



# Approaches to Learning

- Pondering, Processing, and Applying Experiences
- Curiosity, Information-Seeking, and Eagerness
- Risk-Taking, Problem-Solving, and Flexibility
- Persistence, Attentiveness, and Responsibility
- Imagination, Creativity, and Invention
- Aesthetic Sensibility

*If I can ask my own questions, try out my ideas, experience what's around me, share what I find;*

*If I have plenty of time for my special pace, a nourishing space, things to transform;*

*If you'll be my patient friend, trusted guide, fellow investigator, partner in learning;*

*Then I will explore the world, discover my voice, and tell you what I know in a hundred languages.*

**Pamela Houk**

The Approaches to Learning domain includes children's attitudes toward, and interest in, learning. These are manifested in all domains and curriculum areas, including music, dramatic play, and art.

Children of preschool age are beginning to be curious and confident in their ability to learn and enjoy exploration and discovery through play. They enjoy learning and demonstrate some personal areas of interest as well as strategies for finding out more about those interests. They typically are starting to express creativity and imagination through a variety of avenues, and they take initiative when appropriate and show pride in their accomplishments. Moreover, they are demonstrating an increased ability to attend to and persist with tasks even after encountering obstacles.

Approaches to learning permeate every aspect of a child's educational experience. These characteristics and dispositions are the foundation of all future learning and are manifested differently from child to child. It is the responsibility of each teacher to nurture the uniqueness of every child.

## Engagement: A Lesson from Life

*The diamond ring on Ms. Johnson's finger fascinated her class and sparked a long conversation about weddings. Thinking about it later, the teacher realized the children had a wealth of information about weddings to share with one another, and she asked whether they would like to have a "wedding" at school. Soon committees were busy drawing ideas for outfits and cakes, composing invitations, collecting recordings of wedding music, and practicing a special march: "step, stop; step, stop." Preparing a multi-layered cake took many days. Meanwhile, children planned the transformation of their classroom, pacing off the length of a construction-paper carpet. The "brides" and "grooms" arrived for the big day attired in their favorite fancy or fanciful outfits. Some wore princess dresses. One child wore a tinfoil "robot" costume his grandmother helped him make. Family members enjoyed the gala from tiny chairs arranged in rows, and everyone celebrated afterward with cake, juice, and dancing.*

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## Pondering, Processing, and Applying Experiences

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*This aspect includes forming ideas, reflecting on past events, posing theories about the future, and acting on knowledge of the real world.*

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### Widely Held Expectations

#### Children begin to:

- Draw on everyday experiences and apply that knowledge to other situations.
- Seek information for further understanding.
- Generate ideas and suggestions and make predictions.
- Describe or act out a memory of a situation or action.
- Form hypotheses about cause and effect.

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### Strategies for Early Educators

- Allow ample amounts of time for activities involving individual choice and shorter periods for large-group activities.
- Provide time for sharing experiences that involve more than one child or adult.
- Give children time to plan what they are going to do that day and provide time later for them to think and talk about what they did.
- Provide children with the means to represent their ideas in more than one medium (e.g., painting, drawing, blocks).
- Furnish materials that will facilitate the re-creation of memories or experiences that a child can share.
- Supply materials that encourage a spirit of inquiry.
- Encourage children to ask questions of one another and share/compare ideas.
- Listen and respond to exchanges of children's words and thoughts (e.g., open up a discussion of what happened in a class meeting).
- Set an example by thinking out loud.
- Discuss the sequencing and timing of experiences.
- Promote decision-making.

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### Strategies for Families

- Create time at home every day to talk with your children. Use meal times to talk about your day and ask about theirs. Talk about what you did yesterday and what you will do tomorrow.
- Pay attention as your child talks about her experiences and ask follow-up questions that will encourage her to think and reflect, such as "How did you feel about

that?" or "Why do you think that happened?" or "What else might happen?"

- Talk about the books, videos, and television programs your family enjoys.
- Provide time for unscheduled activities that allow your child to explore the world on his own and to generate ideas.

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## Curiosity, Information-Seeking, and Eagerness

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*This aspect includes expressing interest in the world, asking questions to find answers, and experimenting with materials.*

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### Widely Held Expectations

#### Children begin to:

- Use multiple strategies and all available senses to explore the environment.
- Choose to participate in an increasing variety of experiences.
- Demonstrate an eagerness and interest in learning through verbal and nonverbal means while playing, listening, questioning, and interacting.

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### Strategies for Early Educators

- Offer choices.
- Make materials available that can be used or combined in a variety of ways.
- Provide items for use in dramatic play that authentically reflect life (e.g., a real firefighter's hat, a real doctor's stethoscope, or an authentic kimono).
- Stock the classroom with materials that appeal to both genders and a full range of learning characteristics, cultures, and ability levels of children. Schedule large uninterrupted blocks of time every day for children to use these materials.
- Listen to children and build on their individual ideas and concepts.
- Set an example by sharing children's excitement in discovery and exploration on their level (e.g., digging through snow in winter to see if the grass is still there; looking for flower buds in spring and yellowing leaves in fall).
- Use open-ended and leading questions to explore different interests or to elicit suggestions (e.g., "How can you make the car go faster?" or "How does the water make the wheel turn at the water table?").

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### Strategies for Families

- Allow your child to play with pots and pans, cups, mixing spoons, and plastic containers.
- Provide supervised experiences with everyday items that can be manipulated (such as nuts and bolts) or taken apart (such as an old electric mixer with the cord removed).
- Let children help with household chores such as cooking, folding laundry, and washing dishes and talk about what you are doing.
- Plan family outings to interesting places, such as parks, museums, national monuments, and science centers.
- Include your child in daily errands, such as trips to the grocery store, bank, or post office.
- Spend time outside exploring nature.
- Make time to join your child in playful activities.
- Share your cultural traditions.
- Ask questions and encourage children to do likewise.

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## Risk-Taking, Problem-Solving, and Flexibility

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*This aspect includes independent thinking, recognizing problems and trying to solve them in a variety of ways, and a willingness to try new things and collaborate with others.*

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### Widely Held Expectations

#### Children begin to:

- Demonstrate a willingness to choose a variety of both familiar and new experiences.
- Demonstrate the ability to tell the difference between appropriate and inappropriate (or dangerous) risk-taking.
- Attempt a variety of strategies to solve problems.
- Demonstrate resilience in the face of challenges.

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### Strategies for Families

- Recognize “mistakes” as opportunities to learn. (For example: If a teddy bear is left out in the rain, ask “How can we fix it?” or “What can we do so this won’t happen again?” Express confidence that your child will make a better choice the next time.)
- Take your own mistakes in stride.
- Let children know that their thinking is valued as much as – or even more than – getting the “right” answer. Encourage them to share their thinking with you.

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### Strategies for Early Educators

- Set up clearly defined interest areas where children can work with a variety of interesting building materials and other items, focus on what they are doing, and have their work protected from accidental destruction by others.
- Furnish an abundant supply of thought-provoking, complex materials that can be used in more than one way (e.g., blocks or clay) and are not limited to a single “right” answer.
- Provide challenging, high-quality tools and equipment.
- Establish a predictable, yet flexible, routine.
- Show genuine care, affection, and kindness toward children (e.g., validate their disappointment when a block structure falls down; encourage them to figure out what happened and rebuild).
- Recognize that “mistakes” are inevitable and treat them as opportunities to learn.
- Set an example by acknowledging one’s own “mistakes” and modeling constructive reactions to them.
- Help children think and talk through different approaches to problems (e.g., when their favorite game isn’t available, encourage them to consider another choice).
- Encourage children to share, listen, and ask questions of one another and compare strategies and solutions.
- Promote collaboration to achieve common goals.
- Model flexibility.

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## Persistence, Attentiveness, and Responsibility

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*This aspect refers to the ability to sustain attention, pursue difficult tasks, cope successfully with trying situations, and take responsibility for one’s own learning.*

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### Widely Held Expectations

#### Children begin to:

- Demonstrate the ability to remain engaged in an experience.
- Work toward completion of a task despite distractions or interruptions.
- Seek and accept help or information when needed.
- Develop a sense of purpose and the ability to follow through.

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### Strategies for Early Educators

- Furnish the classroom with a variety of materials that allow children with diverse interests and abilities to experience success.
- Organize the space in a way that protects children who want to work meaningfully for extended periods of time.
- Provide resources that allow children to carry explorations to a deeper level of meaning and understanding.
- Be flexible in allowing children to use materials in a creative and integrated way.
- Establish procedures, routines, and rules to instill responsibility.
- Plan projects that are completed over the course of several days.
- Structure the day so transitions and distractions are minimized.
- Recognize and plan for children's differences and their diverse ways of learning.
- Watch for and acknowledge increasing complexity in a child's play (e.g., "Your tower of blocks became a fire station and now you've built a whole town").
- Allow children to share ownership of the classroom by participating in discussions related to classroom decisions and helping to establish rules and routines.
- Offer assistance only after determining a child's need and intent.
- Ask probing questions when children reach a state of confusion, to bring them to a greater understanding.
- Celebrate perseverance as well as the completed project (e.g., make comments like "You're the kind of person who doesn't give up").
- Provide real-life and purposeful experiences (e.g., "How many graham crackers will we need for your table at snack time?").
- Show that you value children's thinking processes by acknowledging their work and effort (e.g., "Look how long and hard you worked on this").
- Encourage children to listen carefully to what others in the class are saying and ask questions.

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### Strategies for Families

- Allow your child to play and learn skills at a pace that is comfortable and be supportive of his efforts. Build enough time into the morning schedule to allow him to dress himself, even though you could do it in less time.
- Organize toys, books, and puzzles so children can access them and not be distracted by clutter. Provide shelves, baskets, or other containers so they can sort their toys and put their space in order.

- Rotate toys so your child can make full use of them and not be overwhelmed.
- Give your child chores and break them down into manageable steps. Work together and offer choices. (For example, say "Which would you like to do first – pick up your blocks or pick up your clothes?").
- Involve children in planning family activities, such as vacations or trips to museums, festivals, parks, and the library.

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## Imagination, Creativity, and Invention

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*This aspect includes originality, playfulness, and having multiple interests.*

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### Widely Held Expectations

#### Children begin to:

- Take on pretend roles in play and make-believe with objects.
- Approach tasks and experiences with increasing flexibility, imagination, and inventiveness.
- Use or combine materials/strategies in novel ways while exploring and solving problems.
- Think more openly and creatively by comparing and contrasting solution strategies.

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### Strategies for Early Educators

- Provide children with adequate time to fully explore materials.
- Set up well-organized, clearly defined interest areas abundantly stocked with thought-provoking materials.
- Provide open-ended materials that can be used in more than one way and are not limited to one "right" answer.
- Illustrate and model how different kinds of media and materials can be used together.
- Provide materials reflective of diverse cultures, abilities, and family structures.
- Introduce materials and explore a range of ways to use them.
- Invite children to think of other ways to use the materials.
- Provide experiences in which the goal is to try many different approaches rather than finding one "right" solution.
- Foster cooperative learning groups.
- Promote the integrated use of materials throughout activities and centers (e.g., say "Let's get some paper



from the writing center to make signs for the city you made in the block center”).

- Challenge children to consider alternative ideas and endings of stories.
- Help children accommodate and build on one another's ideas to achieve common goals (e.g., suggest that individual block structures can be put together to make a much larger one).

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### Strategies for Families

- Enjoy reading a variety of books with your child.
- Allow children to solve problems in their own way.
- Show appreciation and enthusiasm for children's efforts. Ask them to talk about what they did and what happened.
- Encourage pretend play. Put a blanket over the dining room table to make a “cave.”
- Engage children in making up games, jokes, songs, and stories.

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## Aesthetic Sensibility

*This aspect includes appreciation and enjoyment of culture and beauty in its many forms, including music, art, humor, dance, drama, nature, and photography.*

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### Widely Held Expectations

#### Children begin to:

- Appreciate and use humor.
- Demonstrate a sense of wonder and pleasure.
- Take delight in beauty.

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### Strategies for Early Educators

- Use soft surfaces, light colors, and comfortable furniture to create a warm, inviting classroom atmosphere.
- Provide materials children can manipulate, explore with their senses, and use in different ways.
- Display children's artwork on a rotating basis, along with other items of beauty (e.g., wall hangings, tapestry, weavings, posters, stained glass, or arrangements of flowers and leaves).
- Acquaint children with the many different kinds of music and musical instruments.
- Provide occasions for children to move, dance, and pretend. Let them choose which costumes, materials, and artifacts to use.

- Invite professional artists, musicians, dancers, and craftspeople representing different cultures and languages to visit the classroom.
- Visit local museums, art exhibits, dance recitals, theater productions, poetry readings, concerts, or other arts venues.
- Borrow library prints of great artwork representing a variety of countries and ethnic groups, hang them at the eye level of the children, and have conversations about them.
- Put illustrated coffee-table books in the classroom's book area.
- Set an example by demonstrating spontaneity, a sense of wonder, and excitement.
- Use reflective dialogue when talking with children about what they have experienced.
- Laugh with children and show that you enjoy sharing their sense of humor.
- Provide opportunities for sharing authentic cultural traditions.
- Invite parents to share their artistic and musical gifts with the class.

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### Strategies for Families

- Point out and share in your child's wonder of nature, such as a cloud formation, ripples in a pond, or dew on a flower.
- Find time every day to have fun with your child.
- Discuss what you are seeing and enjoying during walks and drives, such as a beautiful building, flowers and trees in bloom, or sweet smells.
- Provide opportunities for your child to experience a variety of authentic cultural activities, such as attending an international festival.
- Share jokes, funny anecdotes, and riddles.
- Take your child to local museums, cultural exhibits, and musical events.
- Tell your children stories about your own childhood.